

## Void, Turning Point, Element:

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0. I'd like to share with you an extraordinary memory. I remember I was lying in bed. Heat and humidity had oozed into my room with such a thickness, however, that there was really no chance of sleeping at all. There I lay, a thirteen year old kid, waiting for this jelly to be washed away by the coolness of night, yet time itself seemed to have been knocked out. Then, I took my walkman (does anyone remember the walkman?) and put in a cassette of Pearl Jam's debut album *Ten*. I remember I didn't care much for their music before; still I gave it another shot. That's when it happened. By the end of track five, *Black*, I knew a change had occurred, even though there was, strictly speaking, nothing to know. How could there be any knowing what it was going to be a change *into*? Eighteen years onwards though, I can say with confidence that it was truly an opening: I let my hair grow long, started playing the electric guitar, went to many a rock festival, and ultimately declared my love for music in a much broader – admittedly less rocking – way. And the list goes on till this very day, in spite of the countless times it really seemed to have ended.

1. If I asked anyone of you right now, I trust you could name a moment in your life that came out of nowhere, but somehow you knew it was the foreboding of a boundless change. I trust you could give me your very own hazardous list of what did and didn't happen as a consequence. Finally, if you looked back, I trust you'd have little doubt this moment was the break of a lifetime. Please take a few seconds now and be reminded of this moment and the changes that came next. – If the works of BKR that we open here today have any common ground, I believe it's precisely the process of change I've just hinted at; not merely on the level of personal experiences though, but as a daring commitment to manifest and share this process itself.

2. What *is* this process? To answer this question, I now jump from hints and memories to a theoretical punctuation. I'll try to clarify how the works perform a process of developing one question into another question. Our itinerary will then be going through these developments. We'll begin by asking what a *void* is. This question will render the possibility of a *turning point*; a possibility which will spark the new question, what an *element* is. Hopefully the questions I develop in theory, do justice to the questions that BKR have developed into works of art.

3. So what's a void? I guess most of us would say that voids are bits of nothing that belong to a greater whole. But how can 'nothing' be condensed into *a bit* of nothing? Vice versa, how could anything contain such a bit of nothing? – This line of questioning is going nowhere: for taking a void to be the negative complement of material substances, is a false beginning. We might conclude, on the contrary, that the very idea of the void is nonsensical, absurd even. But there's a prejudice in declaring the void unthinkable, too. If you take as the starting point of your reasoning, however implicit, that everything is in its right place, it's hardly surprising that there is no room for a void. But is assuming a perfect world not one huge assumption too many? Let's *not* assume any fixed direction, any given meaning. Whatever meaning and direction actually exist, they're not absolute but arbitrary; not total but partial; not given but produced. It's uncanny to do without assumptions, but on the upside, an answer to our question may be forthcoming: a void can be defined, not as the absurd negative of substance, but as a thing that hasn't entered the machine that produces meaning, a *stranger*; consequently, a void isn't featured in the machine's functional domain, its 'world'; yet, the machine cannot prevent a void from appearing in its unproduced, gritty and useless state.

4. That's why more often than not voids go unnoticed; they're not on the map, so to speak. But the map is not the territory, and if you look closer, it's really quite hard to miss them. In fact, the thing about voids is, once you've noticed them, forgetting them can be pretty tough. This makes

for a positive definition: a void *insists*. It bypasses the machine, skips the filter, hence no established meaning mediates it. If, according to Marshall McLuhan, the medium is the message, a void, rather than sending any message, is a direct affection. Mute as it is, it touches you and you alone. So a void *singles* you *out* from the common set of directions produced day in day out, while it also *institutes an impulse*. Now let's summarize: a void is *insisting in a singular impulse*. This positive definition, however, constitutes a real development of the former negative one, warranting a change of name: as soon as we affirm the existence of a void, it develops into a *turning point*. Why call it a turning point? Well, it literally turns you in a new direction, one that's not in the network of ways already paved, the 'world as we know it'; yet, it's undeniably there. Whether this local 'end of the world as we know it' is exciting, annoying, disturbing, horrifying, or perhaps all of these, is best left to your own experiences.

5. By now, theory may start to fall into place with the works of BKR. First, I'd point to the samples of the chapel's walls, which invite, in four different media, a closer look. What seemed to be a flat surface gives way to a terrain characterized by unevenness, imperfections. Moreover, when a kind of threshold of intensity is crossed, a void is manifested. The interesting question this experience leads to is, what about this threshold of intensity? I don't think this question can be answered in any general way: it's rather a question that singles you out, one that only you can answer. If you look into an abyss, Friedrich Nietzsche said, the abyss looks back into you. The works make the *question* appear, no more no less. Still, it's possible to recognize and even share that there are turning points and they happen to all of us.

6. Is it not a blatant contradiction that turning points, which are by definition uncommon, would be universal? In my experience, the photographs taken of the clay developments of several holes in the chapel's walls reconcile this paradox. As Jeroen Damen jokingly noted during a preview of the works, the objects in the pictures levitate, impervious to gravity or any law of mechanics. I suggest we take the joke seriously: for the objects we witness play no part in the common field of forces, are not subject to the rules and regulations of mechanics, or any machine for that matter. This we had already concluded, but *seeing* the implication is all the more fascinating. While as a first development the sampling of the walls made the voids visible, these pictures, by isolating them from their environment, perform a second development: affirming the possibility of a turning point, they make the bare minimum of concrete individuality appear. Michel Houellebecq has one of his protagonists admit that 'he believes in the possibility of an island in time'. That's what these pictures offer me: turning points as actually existing islands in time. If you believe in their possibility at all, that is...

7. Imagine such an island: as time breaks on its shores, the possibility crystallizes into what it has once been and never will be again. Imagine you'd choose to live on an island like that, just as the characters of Wong Kar-Wai's film *2046* choose to live in the interior of their dearest memories rather than go on and face the fact that what has once been, changes. You stay on the island, when and for as long as you don't change. Call it a time capsule, call it a comfort zone, but it's certainly seductive: it took even Odysseus, the 'man of a thousand devices', seven years to escape from Calypso's island. So let's not underestimate the seduction of turning points!

8. Once stranded, would you ever leave an island? Would you go the unknown distance the turning point indicates? Would you change? Why would you? Again, it's not a matter of answering in the general, as a machine 'answers' input by automatically producing output. We need a different kind of answering; therefore we must treat the development of a third question. As we've seen, a turning point is the bare minimum of concrete individuality: 'minimal' means it can't be explained in terms that would be simpler, more basic and original. Thus, there's nothing that can be said to come before it. Then is there nothing to be said at all? Yes, there is. Even if

the question what it really is cannot possibly be answered in terms of what came before, it can be answered in terms of what comes next, of what it may develop into. Answering *this* question isn't possibly automatic. Rather, it requires you to try out things and see if they stand the test of time. This experiment alone may answer if their consistency matches the initial void and its insistence. It's strictly speaking a never-ending trial. But as unexplainable insistence takes on the consistency of whatever it may be, the turning point collects substance, developing into what I think deserves to be called an *element*. And whether there really is a match between the first impulse and what may come as a consequence, in short what this element may be, that's a question only you can answer.

9. Yet questioning elements is something we share. Maybe this sharing is even a necessary experience, the hardest test we can put any element to, as it may prove or disprove that it exists independently, outside the sheer islands of personal illusions, desires, or worse. The poems that BKR have developed into hard matter offer themselves to this most rigorous of tests. Poetry, unlike prose, refuses to play the grand machine of meanings already taken for granted. In failing to mean anything, a poem really teaches what an element may be. That these poems speak of *orphans* – children cut off from what came before – and what their experiences may have been, at least shows the courage needed for the trial: for how much more elementary can you get?

10. This renders the final question, which is really the beginning question: will you put trust in this element? Will you trust that there are elements at all? I do; and I think BKR wouldn't have made the works they did if they hadn't. If anything, they invite you to trust, too; not just the insistence of voids, not only the safety of an island, and not even the consistency of this or that particular element, but to put your trust in the process of developments itself. I thank them for their stunning achievement, as it appears elementary to me, and thank you for listening to what may be a little addition in theory.